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FROM AIT KAOHSIUNG BRANCH OFFICE

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SUBJECT: Southern Students Want Change in Local Administration

REF: 2005 TAIPEI 3856

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) AIT/K representatives recently discussed the upcoming Kaohsiung mayoral election with 25 third-year university students of voting age at a local university. Those eligible to vote in the Kaohsiung election are highly motivated to vote, although those who would have to return to Taipei to vote were less inclined to do so. The majority of the students said President Chen's recent troubles with corruption and the perception that the DPP has underperformed on the economy act as major catalysts for Taiwan's youth to vote for a change of party during the upcoming election. The students rejected the assertion they are easily taken in by mass media.

Planning to Vote Their Own Minds

¶2. (SBU) In a recent discussion with local students on voting, AIT/K representatives talked to students who fall in the 20 to 21 years old age range. Eleven of the students hail from Kaohsiung, making them eligible to vote in the upcoming Kaohsiung mayoral election on December 9, and of the 11, eight told AIT/K they plan to vote. Those who told AIT/K they will vote plan to do so because it's their first chance to exercise their right to vote; Taiwan's minimum voting age is 20. A few reported receiving guidance from their parents on which party and candidate to vote for, but said they were willing to mislead their parents in order to select their own preferred candidate.

Voting Against the Incumbent Party

¶3. (SBU) The majority of the students reported being disappointed with the DPP's performance and said they plan to vote for a change of government. They highlighted corruption as a trigger for their decision to vote against the DPP candidate and specifically mentioned the Kaohsiung metro, the high-speed rail project, and foreign labor riots (reftel) as particularly alarming. When asked to highlight positive aspects of the DPP's reign, the students mentioned that the DPP had made progress toward correcting the resource imbalance between northern and southern Taiwan. Others highlighted the construction of parks and other beautification improvements around Kaohsiung. Yet another added that infrastructure construction in Taipei during the KMT's rule was more corrupt and took longer to complete than projects being managed during the DPP's reign. However, some students added the DPP's

positive actions should be viewed as electioneering, since no serious structural changes have occurred during its years in power. KMT political figures and their staffers are better educated and more experienced than their DPP counterparts, said another student, concluding that the KMT is better positioned to rule Taiwan.

The Chen Factor

¶4. (SBU) Several students connected their disappointment with President Chen and their anti-DPP votes, saying that the corruption surrounding the President fuels their dislike of DPP candidates. Lumping President Chen with DPP candidates, one student cited the DPP's willingness to "push China's buttons" by furthering Taiwan independence as a disincentive to vote for DPP candidates. Besides, added another, the increasing allegations of corruption indicate that the DPP has paid a disproportionate amount of attention to increasing its power, to the detriment of Taiwan and its people.

The Young and the Media

¶5. (SBU) Most of the students expressed disappointment in Taiwan's media, saying television news is too repetitive, and tends toward tabloid-quality coverage rather than good reporting. The majority believe that they're able to discern good reporting from bad and deny the common belief that because of their youth, they're easily swayed by popular media. One student credited the critical training she receives at university for her ability to decipher good news from bad. She added that she prefers browsing international internet media to reading local papers. Another added that Taiwan youth's lack of enthusiasm for politics derives from the belief that

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they are powerless to change the status quo, not from lack of caring.

Unofficial Poll Results

¶6. (SBU) During the meeting, AIT/K took an unofficial poll of the students, which 16 of them completed. Of the 16, five self-identified as DPP supporters, seven as KMT, one as TSU, and two as non-affiliated. When asked how they might vote in the upcoming election, four said they'd vote for DPP candidate Chen Chu, eight would vote for KMT candidate Huang Chun-ying, one would vote for TSU candidate Lo Chih-ming, and two said they wouldn't vote for any of the three.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The youth vote on which the DPP has relied so heavily in the past may not be with the party this time during the Kaohsiung mayoral election. Disappointment with the DPP over corruption and the economy may not inspire the students to vote for the KMT because they support that party, but may encourage them to vote against the local ruling party, the DPP.

THIELE

YOUNG